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# The Reformed Journal

A PERIODICAL OF REFORMED COMMENT AND OPINION

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THE ROBBER ON THE CROSS

GROWING UP RELIGIOUSLY (II)

*John T. Daling*

JOHN CALVIN AND ECUMENICITY

*John Bratt*

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF ELECTION

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JOHN CALVIN ON DOCTRINE AND LIFE

*The Editors*

WORKING PATTERNS  
IN THE SOCIAL-ECONOMIC FIELD

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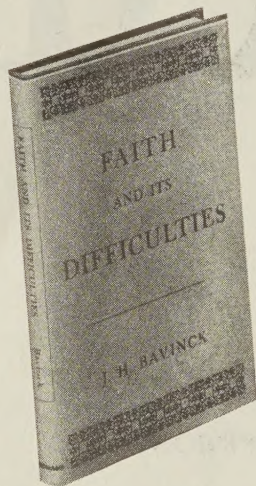
BOOK REVIEWS

LETTERS



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by  
J. H. BAVINCK



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# The Reformed Journal

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# *The Robber on the Cross*

*And [the robber] said to Jesus, Lord, remember me, when thou shalt come into thy kingdom. Jesus said to him, Verily, I say to thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise. (Luke 23:42, 43)*

In this wicked man a striking mirror of the unexpected and incredible grace of God is held out to us, not only in his being suddenly changed into a new man, when he was near death, and drawn from hell itself to heaven, but likewise in having obtained in a moment the forgiveness of all the sins in which he had been plunged through his whole life. . . . Who would ever have thought that a *robber*, in the very article of death, would become not only a devout worshipper of God, but a distinguished teacher of faith and piety to the whole world, so that we too must receive from his mouth the rule of a true and proper confession? . . .

We ought to observe Christ's inconceivable readiness in so kindly receiving the robber without delay, and promising to make him a partaker of a happy life. There is therefore no room to doubt that he is prepared to admit into his kingdom all, without exception, who shall apply to him. Hence we may conclude with certainty that we shall be saved, provided that he remember us; and it is impossible that he shall forget those who commit to him their salvation.

But if a robber found the entrance into heaven so easy, because, while he beheld on all sides ground for total despair, he relied on the grace of Christ; much more will Christ, who has now vanquished death, stretch out his hand to us from his throne, to admit us to be partakers of life. For since Christ has "nailed to his cross the handwriting which was opposed to us" (Col. 2:14) and has destroyed death and Satan, and in his resurrection has triumphed over "the prince of the world" (John 12:31) it would be unreasonable to suppose that the passage from death to life will be more laborious and difficult to us than to the robber. Whoever then in dying shall commit to Christ, in true faith, the keeping of his soul, will not be long detained or allowed to languish in suspense; but Christ will meet his prayer with the same kindness which he exercised towards the robber. . . .

As Christ has given to all of us, in the person of the robber, a general pledge of obtaining forgiveness, so, on the other hand, he has bestowed on this wretched man such distinguished honour, in order that, laying aside our own glory, we may glory in nothing but the mercy of God alone. If each of us shall truly and seriously examine the subject, we shall find abundant reason to be ashamed of the prodigious mass of our crimes, so that we shall not be offended at having for our guide and leader a poor wretch, who obtained salvation by free grace. . . .



# Growing Up Religiously (II)

*by John T. Daling*

THE previous article explicated the notion that growing up religiously is not an automatic precipitate of regeneration, but a continuous task of the reborn individual. This task, when actually engaged in, proceeds developmentally; it takes effort and time; and there can be progression. But, as is possible in other phases of the human being's development, so, too, in the religious there may be immaturities in the form of distortions or arrestments. An example was given of adult religious development stopping at a level reflective of the "tattling" stage of the young child. The present article continues with more analogues between the religious and other aspects or phases of the human being's development.

IT is rather natural for children in late childhood to form groups which psychology books call "gangs." These are relatively small groups of children, from eight or nine to twelve or thirteen years old; the members are all of the same gender, and they usually live rather close together in the same neighborhood. Their purpose, not necessarily conscious, is to form a society of their own, to collect a group of those having similar interests. The group usually has one of its own as a leader, the others follow rather implicitly where the leader goes, or do as he says. There is a strong loyalty among members within the group. And in the opinion of this group they are the only ones who really count. There are, of course, other neighboring groups but these don't really matter; these other groups are strangers, foreigners; in fact, should their paths cross they are enemies to be challenged or fought.

It may be stretching a point, yet many adult but immature Christians tend to act similarly. They have banded together around a leader to form an "in-group" because they live rather closely together or because they have the same racial or national ancestry, and because they have similar beliefs. Like their childhood "gang" analogues, they are hostile to, antagonistic toward, or consider themselves exclusively different from, any similar group. The immaturity here lies basically in the childish inability to distinguish what is important and what is not important in Christianity. At least some of such people are quite able to distinguish what is and what is not important in business or in some

other area, but they act as if they have a blind spot along these lines in matters of religion. In the realm of religion, whatever they hold they hold all to be of equal importance. These sentiments may be construed as skimming dangerously on thin ice. But it is highly relevant to remind ourselves that Paul strongly protested against any identification of a church group with the particular outlook or personality of a specific human being.

The above immaturity is not an argument against denominations. Rather, this is cited as a form of immaturity on the premise of a Scripturally oriented claim that the mature Christian, in whatever denomination he be, does not identify *the* Church with his particular church. He does not limit the Church of God to that part of it to which he happens to belong. Of course, he believes that his church is the purest and best for him, but as a mature Christian he realizes that his fellow Christian in another denomination has the same conviction about his own church. Thus just as the ordinary adult is tolerant toward the many different childhood gangs in his general neighborhood as long as these remain somewhat orderly, so by a loose analogy the mature Christian is tolerant toward different expressions of the Christian faith.

Mature Christians are not indifferent to variations in Christian belief. Quite the opposite. They may even be acutely aware of them. But they are also sensitively aware of some other things which have bearing on this matter. Among these are: the belief that God distributes gifts differently among men, also among those whom He has regenerated; the knowledge that there often are historical and sociological bases for variations in Christian belief; the awareness that denominational splits have at times risen more from personality clashes than from other reasons; the conviction that God has His people in other places of the world than where his own church or denomination happens to be located; the conviction that the unity of basic beliefs of Christianity is more important than peripheral differences; the conviction that he himself is not infallible, that though it is probable that others are wrong it is not impossible for him to be wrong also in the area of his Christian beliefs; the conviction that he himself is saved by God not because of his correct beliefs but in spite of his incorrect ones, and that this is true for those in other denominations too.

It seems possible to detect analogues to still another stage of the human being's development. It is rather characteristic of the person in his middle adolescent phase to be quite conspicuously individualistic. In this stage, usually between sixteen and eighteen or nineteen, the person seems to go out of his way to attract attention to himself. He wants others to notice that he is different from everyone



else. He may at times do constructive things for the sake of being in the spotlight of attention, but he may also do absurd things, brazen things, dangerous things, or even foolhardy ones. The main notion here is that it is rather common for the adolescent to go through a stage in which he is "loud" in one form or another, be that in dress, or in speech, or in action.

It seems that some reborn people show similar tendencies with respect to their Christianity. It may border on the uncharitable to designate or characterize some of these types. But in a treatment such as this it is hardly avoidable.

There are, for example, those who seemingly feel that they are not making any kind of contribution to the Kingdom unless they can do it in a manner that puts them in the spotlight. There are apparently "publicity hounds" in the area of Kingdom work too. Saint Paul had to contend with this type.

And there are those whose Christianity is still so immature that they feel they must do something unusual to show others or to convince themselves that they are Christians. These have not yet matured to the stage where they have come to realize that the Christian way is not first of all a matter of doing something unusual but primarily a matter of doing anything in an unusual way; that is, doing whatever happens to be their role in life to do to the best of their ability, not for the sake of the approval of their fellow-man nor even for their own satisfaction first of all but primarily because that is the way it ought to be done, that is the way of doing even the usual to His glory. In his day Paul had to struggle with this matter in the form of those who thought they had to show their Christianity by speaking with tongues. And it is in the context of this problem that he inserts that memorable chapter on "the more excellent way," which turns out to be a way that requires no special profession or vocation but is applicable in any of them.

THERE seems to be another type which has characteristics analogous to other aspects of the middle adolescent. For want of a good name this could be called the heresy-hunter type. It is the type that rather readily and also often noisily brands fellow Christians as "un-Reformed" or "un-Christian." It is with mixed feelings that the writer discusses this type. He does not relish the task. An ostrich-attitude would probably be safer. But fidelity to the situation seems to make its inclusion almost unavoidable.

In his individualism the middle adolescent is likely to be revolutionary. He is inclined to rebel against things as they are, and to rebel for something different. In so doing he sets himself up as the stand-

ard. He is the one who is going to determine how things ought to be. He it is that is going to set things straight. He is likely to have a sort of Messianic-complex. He feels that it is up to him and his kind to revolutionize things. Adults have, of course, been around for a long time, they understand the total situation quite well, they realize that everything is not always as simple as it seems, they have learned by long experience that there usually are many intermediate shades of grey between the extremes of black and white. But, the adolescent feels rather cocksure that he has the answers, that he knows the way things really are and how they actually ought to be. Also, he is brimmed full with a confidence that he can bring about the change.

It seems that those here designated as heresy-hunters betray analogous tendencies concerning the Christian way. They believe that they, and they alone, have the answers. They consider themselves to be the authority, and often a rather ultimate one at that. They seem to believe that the future welfare of the Christian Church rests with them, and them alone. They seem inclined to think that everything can be distinguished in terms of only black or only white, and that they are the ones who can do it. By exalting a certain point of view as if it were the only one, they condemn any view deviating from theirs. Theirs is espoused as the only Christian view and thereby any other is branded as un-Christian or un-Reformed. And sad to say, just as the middle adolescent is apt to run roughshod over others in his rebelliousness, so the heresy-hunter will frequently abandon ethics for what he claims to be truth. The individualistic adolescent is not averse to striking a pugilistic or belligerent pose. The heresy-hunter may employ a similar tactic. Apparently there is not too much concern about attempting to understand what the fellow Christian meant, but a quickness to show that what he said is wrong and even "wrongness" with respect to trivia is made to seem important. That what he said is wrong, and even "wrongness" Thus, analogous to the attention, seeking adolescent, by these means as well as others the heresy-hunter attracts attention, and this seems to fulfill some need in him.

The mature Christian is not a heresy-hunter. He takes no delight in sniffing for wrongness in a person's views. He is not immune to heresy, nor is he indifferent to it. He may find it. But when he does, it is not because he has been hounding for some isolated instance. It is because he can no longer avoid it as a persisting tendency. He has repeatedly stumbled onto or over it. And this, not because he had kept himself blind. Quite the contrary. He always has a holy zeal for truth, at least he tries to make and keep his zeal for truth



a holy one. And thus he has a zeal not only for truth but also for love. His Christian love insists on giving his fellow Christian the benefit of the doubt, if such there be. The mature Christian tries awfully hard to follow Paul's injunction "to speak the truth in love." For him ethics and truth are interrelated, they are of one piece, wedded together; they go hand-in-hand with interlocked fingers as he views his fellow-man.

In his relations to his fellow-man the mature Christian distinguishes rather clearly between what he considers to be a mistaken notion and what he believes to be an un-Christian view.\* He will long hesitate to make the latter judgment because he reverently feels that such a judgment disparagingly questions his fellow Christian's relationship to his God. Hence, the mature Christian will first of all seek to determine whether he understood his fellow-man correctly, and if he does he will seek personally to correct him, he may even enlist others to help him correct in a face-to-face setting what he believes to be the erroneous view of his fellow Christian. He will seek out no subterfuges to accomplish this. It will pain him much if at long last he must conclude that his fellow Christian is holding an un-Christian view. His first impulse will not be to broadcast this.

In short, it is not the mark of a mature Christian to bandy readily or recklessly such terms as "un-Reformed" or "un-Christian." Theological, ecclesiastical, or other debates in the Christian area have lost their holy purpose when they generate interpersonal strife and conflict resulting from quick identification of "mistakenness" with "un-Reformedness." In such cases not love and truth but man, the person, has taken over the spotlight. What seems to be a holy cause has come to be espoused for an essentially unholy reason. Correctness of a view helps not much when Christian-ness is sacrificed to insist upon it. It may be re-

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\* It would be erroneous to construe this entire sub-topic as a "gag rule" on all debate, difference of opinion, or intelligent discussion of opposing views. The main point that wants to be made is that it is one thing to maintain that a view is mistaken, quite another to show that it incontrovertibly is so, and more significantly that even the latter is as yet no grounds for hasty branding as un-Reformed whether this be done by direct statement or by innuendo. This "branding" is likely to focus upon the person instead of his view, and much unnecessary damage can thus be done to reputation. Differences can be sharp at the level of opinion without digging wounds in the person. An ironical attitude between or among persons is always the *desideratum* in the Christian community. But this unity of purpose does not necessarily entail a uniformity of opinion. Paradoxical though it may seem, it is difficult to see how there can be advance in Christian thought without some Christian differing from another Christian at some time or other. But this still doesn't mean that either the one or the other was non-Christian. It may only mean that the one or the other was mistaken in his view at that time (and it is not impossible that they both were!).

joined that Paul insisted much on correctness of belief. But the relevant comment here would be: watch carefully the workings of his "Christized" personality when he does it.

THUS far this treatment has made but a few (and these somewhat indirect) references to recognizable marks of a *mature* Christian in the religious sense. It would be vain to attempt a complete catalogue of these. Better it is to return to the Scripture which is replete with them. Dangerous, too, is any attempt to single out the main ones. But perhaps it will not be too inappropriate to sketch some of the significant ones even though there is the risk of omitting some that are outstanding.

It is difficult to say which is the foremost. Surely among the top priorities is: the ability and willingness to forgive. This is not as easy as it sounds or looks: to obliterate the bitterness even though one remembers the deed, takes greatness of inner spirit. Furthermore, really to forgive someone else means, among other things, that one actually understands his own self, and this is not easy. Some say that they forgive, but they thereafter do not act it because they have not felt it. And maybe those who find it so difficult to forgive others still have not made real in their own soul the significance of what God has forgiven them; they are still childish in always only expecting from others what a young child cannot as yet rightly expect of itself.

Another mark of the mature Christian is the willingness to fellowship with other Christians whether these be of one's own denomination, race, nationality, social position, or of *any* other. John says if we claim that we are walking in the light, then we have fellowship one with another. The way he states it, the *latter* is the test of the former.

Toleration with respect to differences of opinion seems also to be a mark. This does not mean indifference regarding essentials, but it does involve clear-sightedness with respect to what is central and what is peripheral, not only with respect to one's own denomination but also to Christianity-at-large. Many, but not all, older Christians mellow much in this matter. As the twilight of life approaches, many apparently get increasing light as to what is really important in or for Christian belief and what is less important. About the latter they do not let their blood pressure get to the boiling point.

In a priority rating it would be extremely difficult to avoid this one: love for fellow-man wherever one meets him or in whatever condition one finds him. The reason for this is close at hand: he has been created by and is an image-bearer of God. Surely the second statement of the summary of the Law makes this neighborly love imperative. And our Master's parable as well as Peter's vision



make it plain that no hedging is possible on this score. Yet it is difficult to do, and it takes a lot of inner training to get to the stage that one does do it.

A living trust in God as one's loving Father, the cognizant assurance that His Son is one's Redeemer and the struggling willingness to make Him the Master in one's daily chores and nightly dreams, as well as the increasing consciousness of the Holy Spirit in one's being and the increasing willingness to let Him color and permeate one's wishes and doings — this too, and more, is also a mark. These things one may vocalize rather readily, and also intellectualize, but to personalize them, in the sense of actualizing them, is not easy.

Another that should not be omitted is: getting to the stage where one is above rules. By this is meant that one lives increasingly less by rules and increasingly more by the spirit of the Christ-mindedness to which one has attained. This will not mean license. It may well be that some Christians must have rules all their lives because they fail to grow up religiously. But it is the mark of a mature Christian that he has freedom. Not an unlimited freedom, only God has that, but a freedom *in Christ*. And to be free in Christ means to act in conformity with His spirit.

How many more should be added? The list could become a long one. Perhaps it would be best to quote one of the synopses which Paul gives when he says that the fruit of the Spirit is: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such things, says he, there is no law. Note well that this is fruit. These are not passive givens. They are living expressions of the constant striving to become heavenly dispositioned here and now.

It should be apparent that such "marks" of religious maturity are not causally connected with academic level, social or ecclesiastical position, professional standing, or economic status. They can be achieved by the adult Christian in any area of society. They are often present where least expected, and not infrequently lacking where one would expect to find them most. They can at times be clearly recognizable in those of low estate, yet also far from fully developed among members of high estate in the Christian community.

Marks of religious maturity should not be confused with theological acumen. Much effort is often expended in theologizing the Christian view, but Christianizing one's personality is quite another matter. The latter requires a straining and a directing of effort quite different from the former. Though the former may be the privilege of the gifted few, the latter is the divinely imposed requirement of all. Sometimes these two are confused so that the one comes to be considered as if

it were the other. Scripture does not do so. It does not state that man's job is merely to theologize his view, but it clearly states that each reborn person still has the life-long task of Christianizing his personality. To do this can keep the hands, heads, and hearts of each more than busy.

BY way of conclusion: The main thesis throughout these two articles has been that each reborn person has an important and a perpetual *religious* task. This theme is not a new one. It is as old as Christianity. But an attempt was here made to renew emphasis on it, and to contribute something specific as to its nature. Its nature is not primarily that of acquiring a lot of theological knowledge for its own sake. Rather, it is basically a matter of saturatedly training, directing, and controlling all the facets of one's inner being to become increasingly dispositioned in a Christlike way. This constant exercise is not only a matter of mortifying spontaneous and ingrained tendencies which are distorted or perverse. Of at least equal importance it is concurrently a matter of calling out from every nook of one's being any capacity that can be exercised, nourishing it, and cultivating it to its total possible range in the pursuit of good as God counts good. Whether these capacities or gifts be few or many, each person is divinely obligated to bring every facet of his being into subjection to Christ. This, according to Paul, means that each person becomes as much like Him as on this earth is possible.

A subsidiary thesis was that even though none achieves his religious task fully, many seem to stop very soon after they started, and others seem to have brought themselves to a halt long before they arrived at what they could achieve.

Full, complete religious maturity is perhaps not achievable on this side of death's threshold. But Paul states even toward the close of his earthly career that he was still striving, still trying to bring his own inner being into subjection, still grasping for that for which he had been grasped: a completely renewed creature. This continuance of striving, this fighting within one's own self with one's reborn self increasingly championing it over one's old self, this persisting attempt to "Christize" one's own being — this is the basic mark of a religiously mature person.

### Postscripts

It should be noted that this was written in the context of the Christian Reformed denomination. Hence it could well be that at least some "immaturities" of Christians in other denominations are of a different character than the ones treated here, in some cases perhaps even the very opposite.

One more note: It would be erroneous to con-



clude that the writer considers himself far above or completely devoid of the immaturities he has depicted. If they were stated with a clarity that makes them seem easily recognizable, it is most likely because the writer himself rather vividly feels them to be so dangerously close in his own inner being. It may be that such experience is hardly escapable for anyone in the maturing process. At any rate, the writer desperately hopes he has not been guilty of magnifying the splinter in the make-up of others and micro-sizing the beam

in his own. He well realizes that he himself is implicated too in this whole matter of immaturities. His main purpose was to attempt in the light of Scriptural givens to set forth rather objectively the ones he recognized. He does not claim that these are the only ones. In fact, among others he likely failed to recognize some closest to or in his own self. This would not at all be strange, because it may not be easy to be objective also about oneself but it is much, much harder first to be adequately subjective.

# John Calvin and Ecumenicity (I)

by John Bratt

DR. H. P. VAN DUSEN ventured the prediction in 1955 that, "When historians of the future come to assess the most significant development of Christendom in the 1st half of the 20th century, they will fasten on the ecumenical movement." He is doubtlessly right. A spate of articles in religious journals, the propaganda and unitive efforts of active protagonists, and periodic councils of ecumenical bodies reflect that trend of the age.

In this anniversary year of the birth of John Calvin, the definitive edition of his *Institutes*, and the opening of the Academy of Geneva, it may be illuminating to examine and analyze his ecumenical views and convictions. Certain it is that he was far more sensitive on this score than some of his fellow Reformers. Luther seems to have been quite intractable and inflexible. Calvin wrote to Bucer about him in 1538 on this wise: "What to think of Luther, I know not, though I am thoroughly convinced of his piety; but I wish it were false, what is commonly said by most people, . . . that with his firmness there is mixed up a good deal of obstinacy." A year later, in a letter to Zebedee, a Reformed minister at Orbe, he expressed similar sentiments when he deplored that Luther "retracts nothing, palliates nothing, but stubbornly maintains all his opinions." The same rigidity seems to have characterized Bullinger at first. Later on he became more flexible. Bucer and Melancthon were more ecumenically minded but they tended to be less than honest in their ecumenical negotiations. Calvin complained in a letter to Peter Martyr, one of the principal Italian Reformers, that the former "never spoke frankly out" and the latter was inclined to be too conciliatory. After holding conference with the Roman Catholics at Regensburg and reflecting upon it, Calvin wrote his colleague Farel and said, "Philip and Bucer

have drawn up ambiguous and varnished formulas concerning transubstantiation to try whether they could satisfy the other party by giving them nothing. I cannot agree to this device. . . ."

Calvin deplored separations and divisions within the Church. Creating schisms was nothing less than "frightful mutilation of Christ's body." When he ministered to the refugee church at Strassburg, and the Genevan church was racked by internal disturbances and disorders, he wrote to them, out of the grief of his soul, "I cannot hear without great and intense horror that any schism should settle down within the church," adding, "nor besides, ought it to be a light matter to you, that sects and divisions are formed and cherished within the church, which no one who has a Christian heart beating in his breast can without horror even drink in by the hearing of the ears." To Francis Othman, Reformed lawyer at Strassburg, he maintained that "those persons are too little actuated by humane sentiments who can witness the sad dissensions that prevail without being stimulated to seek a remedy." To Zebedee, Reformed minister at Orbe, he wrote with deep feeling, "Good God, to what a point have we come, we ought to consider a separation from the ministers of Christ with the same disposition as if our own bowels were torn out." And when Henry of Navarre's proposed conference found resistance and lukewarmness, Calvin urged continued efforts, saying, "If it is not yet God's plan to open a door, it is our duty to creep through the windows or press through the smallest holes that give us entry, rather than allow an opportunity of bringing about a happy arrangement to escape us." He viewed the fragmentation of Protestantism as the chastising hand of God upon them and as an effort on the part of Satan to extinguish the true light of the gospel



among them. He was convinced that better days were in the offing as far as their separations were concerned. Writing to John Brentz, the German Reformer, he said, "I feel convinced that some limits will be set to our chastisement, and God will speedily reassemble His Church, after this most wretched dispersion." Calvin was stirred by a strong ecumenical spirit.

And his ecumenical convictions did not rest content in the assertions of spiritual unity. Calvin would no doubt have agreed with what Archbishop Temple asserted at Edinburgh in 1937, "It is because we are one in allegiance to one Lord that we seek and hope for the way of manifesting that unity in our witness to Him before the world." He did insist vigorously, however, that despite appearances to the contrary, the Church of Christ possesses real unity. In his commentary on the ecumenical chapter of Ephesians (ch. 4) he contended, "A holy unity exists among us when, consenting in pure doctrine, we are united in Christ alone." In his Geneva Catechism he maintained, "There are not several churches but only one which, under the leadership of Christ, is extended throughout the world." This unity inheres in the fact that all true members of the Church are elect of the same God, mystically united to the same Saviour, dynamized by the same Spirit, animated by the same hope, heirs of the same legacy, devotees of the same basic truths and hence, "in order to embrace the unity of the Church . . . it is unnecessary to see the Church with our eyes or feel it with our hands" (*Inst.* IV, i, 3).

But spiritual unity alone did not suffice. These spiritual bonds are not perceptible to the world. To their mind the Church is hopelessly divided. External unity is also a *desideratum*. Possibilities of organic union should be explored. When Archbishop Cranmer proposed in 1556 a "godly synod" Calvin assured him, "I would not grudge to cross even ten seas if it would bring the churches together." Acquiescing in Cranmer's judgment of divisions as "the chief evil of our time" Calvin wrote him also, "Our purpose is to unite the sentiments of all good and learned men, and so, according to the rule of Scripture, to bring the separated churches into one, neither labor nor trouble of any kind ought to be spared."

CALVIN'S guiding ecumenical principles were fourfold:

A. The presupposition of the True-False Church antithesis.

B. The ascription of mutual obligations to those in the True Church framework.

C. The basis of negotiations laid in the Word of God.

D. The cultivation of flexibility by the participants in the ecumenical encounter.

First, the presupposition of the True-False Church antithesis. Calvin insisted that a religious organization purporting to be a church submit itself to Scriptural testing before church-union proposals be broached. It must first exhibit the marks of the True Church, to wit, the pure preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments in accord with the institution of Christ. If those marks be present the title Church may not be withheld even though there be faults in doctrine and in practice (e.g., the church at Corinth) and if those marks be absent, as in the Roman Catholic institution of his day which had a "corrupt government . . . by which the pure light is suppressed and extinguished" and in which "an execrable sacrilege has been substituted for the Supper of the Lord" (*Inst.* IV, ii, 2) the title Church is thereby forfeited. Efforts at church union may be initiated only when these conditions are met. Each organization entering into ecumenical conversation must hold validly the title Church.

Second, the ascription of mutual obligations to those in the True Church framework. No individual lives unto himself and no Church lives unto itself. It may not hoard its spiritual resources and complacently ply its solitary way. To do so is to be seriously derelict in duty. God has entrusted her with insights and truths in order that she may dispense them to others. The various churches which together comprise the Church of Christ owe to one another "to maintain a brotherly agreement with all the children of God" and "to mutually communicate their advantages to each other" (*Inst.* IV, ii, 1).

Third, the basis of negotiations laid in the Word of God. The Lutheran M. H. Franzmann has expressed well the alternative: "One may seek unity by founding a club, loosely organized and broadly inclusive; or one may seek it by raising a standard about which one may rally." Calvin would insist on the latter. The rallying-point is the Bible. In his *Reply to Sadoletto* he stated that his zeal burned for the unity of the Church "provided only that truth be the bond of concord." "All union," said he, "which is formed without the Word of the Lord is a faction of the impious and not an association of believers . . . Evangelical truth is the bond. May God grant that you and yours may see that there is no other bond of union but this . . ." Calvin suggested that a free and universal council be called "to appease all the troubles of Christendom and in order that all Christendom may be united." Should the Pope be asked to preside (which Calvin did not regard as advisable, however) he must agree to submit to all the decisions. This council should engage in frank and earnest discussion and seek to frame an ecumenical creed or confession. To Cranmer he wrote that it was highly desirable that "an assembly of the most eminent men of



learning, from all the various churches which have embraced the *pure doctrine of the Gospel*, after having discussed separately the controverted topics of the day, might transmit to posterity, out of the *pure Word of God*, a true and distinct confession . . . .” All who refused to accept this confession should be judged schismatic.

Fourth, the cultivation of flexibility by the participants in the ecumenical encounter. Calvin was realistic and knew full well that any ecumenical venture can easily founder on the rocks of pride, narrowism and rigidity. Hence humility, recognition of limited insights and willingness to learn, is the first prerequisite. He set the pace in his preface to his commentary on Romans when he wrote, “God never designed in such a way as to exercise liberality towards his servants, as that each should be endowed with a full and perfect understanding on every point, and doubtless . . . he intended in the first place to keep us humble and next of all to keep up and maintain the desire and the exercise of brotherly love and communion.” Allowance must also be made for minor differences. He wrote to the Lutherans, “Keep your minor differences, let us have no discord on that account, but let us march in solid columns under the banner

of the Captain of our salvation, and with undivided counsels pour the legions of the cross upon the territories of darkness and of death.” In his *Institutes* he distinguished between such indispensable doctrines as the deity of Christ and salvation only by the grace of God and peripheral and controvertible teachings which do not destroy the unity of the faith. As to church polity, although he preferred presbyterianism and claimed for it the most Scriptural support, he allowed for episcopacy. He rebuked John Knox for being unbending on minor points. To the Brothers of Wesel he wrote, “We ought to make mutual concessions in all ceremonies that do not involve any prejudice to the confession of our faith, and for this end that the unity of the church be not destroyed by our excessive rigor or moroseness . . . . The main consideration is, that you do not yield to a faulty pliancy in the confession of your faith and that you make no compromise as to doctrine.” Melancthon tended to go too far and Calvin reminded him that “several of the things which you consider indifferent are obviously repugnant to the Word of God.” Unity in the essentials, concessions in minor points, and charity in controverted issues — that was Calvin’s goal as he led the Protestant ecumenical crusade of his day.

# The Righteousness of Election

by John Weidenaar

POSSIBLY one of the most disturbing, if not shocking, statements in the Bible is the passage recorded in Romans 9:13 which reads: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” At once complaints are heard and objections are raised. This does not surprise us. Paul anticipated this very thing and that is the reason he writes: “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid” (Rom. 9:14).

Obviously the purpose of Paul at this point is to deal with the *righteousness* of predestination. It is therefore incumbent upon us not to confuse the reply of Paul at this point with the subject of the sovereignty of God which will come up later in due order. We must stick to the point at issue. Since the immediate occasion for the discussion of the righteousness of God was the quotation taken from Genesis 25 as well as the quotation from Malachi 1, it is imperative that we deal with the specific facts which these two quotations bring to our attention.

The first revelational fact is this: God never said to Rebekah: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” The manner in which Romans 9:12, 13 is sometimes read creates an erroneous impression. The Lord did say to Rebekah: “The elder shall serve the younger.” We should also remember that the specific purpose of the words “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” is to signalize or point to the personal character of election. But to assume that God from all eternity, before the foundation of the world, or even before the children were born or had done anything good or bad, was filled with burning hatred for Esau is a deduction or an inference which is by no means warranted by the givens furnished in Scripture.

We must ever be on guard against deductive or inferential theology. The danger is always at hand to prefer human reasoning to divine revelation. To be sure, our God is the God of wisdom, the Son is the Logos, and the third Person is the Spirit of truth; therefore the Word of God is su-



premely reasonable and logical. Only, the Lord's thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. The only way for us to be truly logical and reasonable is by following step after step in reverent humility the teaching of the Bible. If we select a truth of the Bible, set it up as a major premise, and then proceed to make our own deductions and inferences, the consequences will prove to be disastrous. Only when we find definite and clear Scriptural warrant to substantiate our conclusions can we be assured that we are interpreting the Word of God aright.

What God said about Esau in Malachi took place centuries after both Jacob and Esau had passed from the earthly scenes. Therefore we are led by Scripture itself to take careful inventory of the attitude and conduct of Esau in our evaluation of God's hatred and Esau's eternal destiny. Failure to do so would be inexcusable negligence and might lead us to entertain unworthy notions of God. It is simply a fact of revelation that the eternal God who is also the God of history did not say before Esau was born, "Esau I hated."

To be sure, God claims the right — and we acknowledge that prerogative — to predetermine both the temporal condition and the eternal destiny of all men. In our formulation and presentation of that doctrine we may not, however, ignore any of the givens of Scripture. One thing is certain. The eternal election of the saved and the rejection of the lost cannot be construed as perfectly co-ordinate and may not therefore be graphically represented by two parallel lines, not even in the interest of logical consistency. Election and rejection cannot be compressed within the narrow confines of our notions of rationality. It is our task to observe and emulate the sobriety of the fathers of Dort who, in their Conclusion to the Canons, wrote:

And this is the perspicuous, simple, and ingenuous declaration of the orthodox doctrine. . . . Whence it clearly appears, that some whom such conduct by no means became, have violated all truth, equity, and charity, in wishing to persuade the public: . . . That the same doctrine teaches, that God, by a mere arbitrary act of His will, without the least respect or view to any sin, has predestinated the greatest part of the world to eternal damnation; and has created them for this very purpose; that in the same manner in which election is the fountain and the cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety; . . . which the Reformed Churches not only do not acknowledge, but even detest with their whole soul.

WHAT, then, is the reply of Paul to the objector who presumes that God is unrighteous when he

says: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated"? Paul's first response is: "God forbid." Paul does not mean to say that man may not reflect upon the doctrine of election. He does not want to stop the discussion. He is not appealing to divine authority with the purpose of putting a stop to further consideration. When Paul says: "God forbid," which literally means, "Let it not be so," and which might better be rendered, "Perish the thought," then Paul is condemning the bold impudence of man who dares to entertain the thought that God could ever be unrighteous. Even when we cannot follow the thoughts and ways of God, we must never allow the idea of God being unrighteous to enter into our mind. If it does, we should reject it at once and cast about for another solution of the problem that baffles us. Whatever solution may be offered, any suggestion that God is unrighteous must be summarily dismissed.

Nor does Paul mean to teach that the righteousness of God is a self-evident truth or an axiom incapable of further analysis or investigation. But Paul has every right at this point in his epistle to insist upon the wholehearted acceptance of the righteousness of God in view of the fact that he had previously in Romans 3 through 8 furnished a complete demonstration of the righteousness of God. The very theme of Paul's epistle to the Romans is that the gospel is the power of God to save those who believe precisely because in it is revealed the righteousness of God!

Conceivably, then, Paul might have terminated his discussion of election at this point in righteous indignation with the retort "God forbid!" But Paul is willing to argue the point. He is going to adduce sound and valid reasons to demonstrate that God is by no means unrighteous when he says: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Observe carefully at this point — with Romans 9 and the necessary quotations before you — that Paul finds his reply by turning to the Scriptures. He does not resort to speculations compounded of deductions and inferences, but he does let the facts of divinely and historically revealed truth have their say. What did God say to Moses? After God had given His law amid thunder and lightning, Moses tarried on the mount to receive further instructions. Meanwhile the people of Israel had made a golden calf which caused the anger of the Lord to wax hot. He threatened to destroy His people Israel and offered to make of Moses a great nation. But Moses interceded and the Lord repented of the evil He said He would do to Israel. When Moses came down from the mount he rebuked the people, punished them so that three thousand were slain, led them to repentance, and reconsecrated them to the Lord. The Lord heard the



prayers of Moses, took note of the repentance of Israel, and agreed to send His angel to lead them into the land of promise. Moses, however, persisted in his intercession that the Lord Himself might go with Israel. This prayer, too, was answered. But Moses is still in doubt and he begs: "Show me, I pray thee, thy glory." It was in response to this petition that the Lord uttered the words quoted by Paul: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."

What does all this mean? Moses and Israel must learn that the preservation of Israel from certain and utterly deserved rejection and doom is not to be ascribed to the fervent intercession of Moses, is not due to the genuine repentance of Israel, but is to be accounted for only on the basis of the sovereign mercy and compassion of Jehovah! The Rev. Horatius Bonar correctly interprets this passage in his hymn:

Not what my hands have done can save my guilty soul;  
Not what my toiling flesh has borne can make my spirit whole.  
Not what I feel or do can give me peace with God;  
Not all my prayers and sighs and tears can bear my awful load.  
Thy grace alone, O God, to me can pardon speak.

How does it come about that God loves Jacob, Israel, His people? It is because God is not only righteous but also and specifically because He is more than righteous! It is because He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy and have compassion on whom He will have compassion. The only explanation for His sovereign compassion is the fact that God is love.

Zo Gij in 't recht wilt treden, O Heer, en gadeslaan  
Onz' ongerechtigheden, ach, wie zal dan bestaan?  
Maar neen, daar is vergeving altijd by U geweest;  
Die wordt Gij, Heer, met beving, recht kiderlijk  
gevreesd.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time and in perfect consonance with the tenor of the epistle to the Romans we are constrained to add:

Welzalig hij, wiens zonden zign vergeven;  
Die van de straf voor eeuwig is ontheven;  
Wiens wanbedrijf, waardoor hij was bevekt,  
Voor 't heilig oog des Heren is bedekt.  
Welzalig is de mens, wie 't mag gebeuren,  
Dat God naar recht hem niet wil schuldig keuren,

1. From a Dutch metrical version of Psalm 130, rendered in the Psalter-Hymnal of the Christian Reformed Church as follows:

Lord, if thou shouldst mark transgression,  
In thy presence who shall stand?  
But with thee there is forgiveness,  
That thy name may fear command.

En die, in 't vroom en ongeveinsd gemoed,  
Geen snoed bedrog, maar blank' oprechtheid voedt.<sup>2</sup>

No one can ever make a beginning in the apprehension and appreciation of election until he is deeply convicted of his righteous rejection by God. The confession of the righteousness of my rejection by God is the inescapable prerequisite for the conscious acceptance of Him who alone of all men realized and experienced the rejection of God on the cross and thus became for us the righteousness of God!

THE second part of Paul's reply deals with Pharaoh. That is Paul's way of establishing the *righteousness* of God in hating profane Esau. Quoting Exodus 9:16, Paul declares in Romans 9:17, "For this very purpose did I raise thee up, that I might show in thee my power, and that my name might be published abroad in all the earth." Does that mean that God created Pharaoh in order to destroy him so that his destruction might show the power of God and publish God's name abroad?

If the passage cited were intended to serve as a vindication of the sovereignty of God, then the notion that God created Pharaoh to damn him might conceivably in the abstract be entertained as a possibility. But even then the possibility would have summarily to be rejected because in that case it would reduce the sovereignty of God to the level of arbitrariness and it would reduce Pharaoh, who despite his depravity was a creature of God and His image-bearer, to the position of a mere pawn on a chessboard.

We must remember that the question which engages Paul's attention is not the sovereignty of God but the righteousness of God. Sovereignty is indeed involved but that topic is addressed in verse 19 and in what follows. Now Paul is discussing what he set out to discuss, namely: "Is there unrighteousness with God?" And appeal to sovereignty at this point would be an evasion of the question Paul himself raised, and that question deals specifically with the righteousness, the moral character, of God.

The question of the righteousness of God must be determined on the basis of what the Bible reveals regarding the moral character of God. The Word of God teaches that God, the Judge of all the earth, will do right (Gen. 18); that it is far from God to do wickedness and from the Almighty to commit iniquity (Job 34); that Jehovah is upright

## 2. *Ibid.*, Psalm 32:

How blest is he whose trespass  
Has freely been forgiven,  
Whose sin is wholly covered  
Before the sight of heaven.  
Blest he to whom Jehovah  
Will not impute his sin,  
Who has a guileless spirit,  
Whose heart is true within.



and there is no unrighteousness in Him (Ps. 92); and that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all (I John 1).

But to come to grips with the question whether God created Pharaoh to damn him, we must examine the passages in Exodus and Romans. What do they say and what do they mean? Those who can read Hebrew and Greek can ascertain that in neither case does the Bible teach that God created Pharaoh to damn him. Those who know neither Hebrew nor Greek can be equally sure by taking careful notice of the context of Exodus 9:16 in the English Bible.

Exodus tells us that God had sent six plagues upon Pharaoh and Egypt. The waters were turned to blood; frogs, lice, flies, murrain of cattle, and sore boils on man and beast had come in rapid succession. The result of the accumulated force of these plagues would have caused a pestilence which would have brought total death to Pharaoh and Egypt (cf. Ex. 9:15). But instead of allowing Pharaoh and the Egyptians to die, God is going to keep them alive in order that they may suffer the righteous wrath of God in the next four plagues. There is purpose and meaning in the divinely revealed break between the first six and the last four plagues. There is no warrant whatsoever for the bold and arrogant view that God, without further and necessary qualification, created Pharaoh to damn him. The judgments of God in the six plagues are tempered with mercy. Fact is, before the seventh plague of hail and fire is poured forth, the Lord exhorted the Egyptians to take the needed steps to preserve their cattle, and some of Pharaoh's servants actually took advantage of the merciful warning!

In dealing with Pharaoh God had been exceedingly condescending, gracious, and patient. But Pharaoh had repeatedly and obstinately rejected the word of God and hardened his heart. Joseph Addison Alexander writes pertinently:

There is a time, we know not when, a point we know not where,  
That marks the destiny of men to glory or despair.  
There is a line, by us unseen, that crosseth every path;  
The hidden boundary between God's patience and his wrath.  
How far may we go on in sin, how long will God forbear?  
Where does hope end, and where begin the confines of despair?  
An answer from the skies is sent — "Ye that from God depart,  
While it is said today, repent, and harden not your heart."

The final destruction of Pharaoh and Egypt is therefore seen to be the clearest possible demonstration of the righteousness of God. If ever a man deserved the wrath of God, that man was

Pharaoh! God is not unrighteous but eminently righteous.

That the righteous judgment upon Pharaoh and Egypt actually did show the power of Jehovah and served to publish His name abroad is confirmed by the confession of Rahab and the testimony of the Gibeonites who reported that they had heard of the name of Jehovah and of His fame and of all that He did in the land of Egypt. Having vindicated the righteousness of God in His destruction of Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea, we are now able to appreciate the conclusion of Paul: "So then he hath mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth."

To lift this passage out of its context and to make it do service for the notion that God arbitrarily predetermined to save the elect and to damn the rejected in such a fashion that these determinations are to be considered as strictly parallel, having nothing to do with the historic situation — which in the nature of the case is a genuine counterpart of the counsel of God — must in the light of Scripture be adjudged speculative and an instance of inferential theology which is miles removed from Biblical theology. The only way in which we can ascertain the contents of the eternal counsel of God is by reading it in the light of the Scripturally revealed historic realization of that plan.

WHAT then is the force of Paul's conclusion? Paul is dealing with the man who presumes to entertain the thought that the Almighty Sovereign of heaven and earth is unrighteous. Wretched, ignorant, profane, arrogant mortal, who would dare to call God to time and teach Him the way of righteousness! Be it so, then! If you would know, O vain man, the logic of your objection and the effect of your accusation, this is it: Look at Pharaoh and when you look at Pharaoh, look at Israel dancing about the golden calf. Both Pharaoh and Israel, both Jacob and Esau, both the world and the Church, both your godless neighbor and you are equally guilty and deserving of the fierce wrath of God because of your sins and rebellion. If, then, God were only righteous as you demand that He be, then Pharaoh and Israel, and Israel no less than Pharaoh; then I and you, whoever we be, are utterly lost. With Isaiah we must cry out: "Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."

But thanks be to God, He is not only righteous but also merciful and compassionate. Because He willed to have mercy in His sovereign grace, Israel is spared; and because He willed to be righteous, Pharaoh is doomed. Our only hope resides in the God of all grace who is sovereign in His mercy and compassion!



## John Calvin on Doctrine and Life

"[Paul] advises Timothy to 'cut down' . . . that is, the manner of explaining which is adapted to edification; for that is the rule by which we must try all interpretation of Scripture." (On II Timothy 2:15)

"How small was the measure of Philip's faith appears from this circumstance, that he cannot utter a few words about Christ without mingling with them two gross errors. He calls him *the son of Joseph*, and says, that *Nazareth* was his native town, both of which statements were false; and yet, because he is sincerely desirous to do good to his brother, and to make Christ known, God approves of this instance of his diligence, and even crowns it with good success. Each of us ought, no doubt, to endeavor to keep soberly within his own limits; and, certainly, the Evangelist does not mention it as worthy of commendation in Philip, that he twice disgraces Christ, but relates that his doctrine, though faulty and involved in error, was useful, because it nevertheless had this for its object, that Christ might be truly known. He foolishly says that he was *the son of Joseph*, and ignorantly calls him a native of *Nazareth*, but yet he leads *Nathanael* to no other than the Son of God who was born in Bethlehem, and does not contrive a false Christ, but only wishes that they should know him as he was exhibited by *Moses and the Prophets*. We see, then, that the chief design of doctrine is, that those who hear us should come to Christ in some way or other.

There are many who engage in abstruse inquiries about Christ, but who throw such darkness and intricacy about him by their subtleties that they can never find him. . . . Would it not be better to stammer ridiculously like Philip, and to hold by the true Christ, than by eloquent and ingenious language to introduce a false Christ? On the other hand, there are many poor dunces in the present day, who, though ignorant and unskilled in the use of language, make known Christ more faithfully than all the theologians of the Pope with their lofty speculations. This passage, therefore, warns us that, if any unsuitable language has been employed concerning Christ by ignorant and unlearned men, we ought not to reject such persons with disdain, provided they direct us to Christ. . . ."

(On St. John 1:45)

" . . . for since all questions which do not tend to edification ought justly to be suspected and even hated by good men, the only lawful commendation of doctrine is this, that it instructs us to fear God and to bow before him with reverence. And hence we are also informed, that the greater progress any one has made in godliness, he is so much the better disciple of Christ; and that he ought to be reckoned a true theologian who edifies consciences in the fear of God."

(On Titus 1:2)

"But what is meant by *according to instruction or doctrine*? The meaning is, that it is useful for the edification of the Church; for Paul is not wont to give the name of 'doctrine' to anything that is learned and known without promoting any advancement of godliness; but, on the contrary, he condemns as vain and unprofitable all specu-

lations which yield no advantage, however ingenious they may be in other respects." (On Titus 1:9)

"He gives the appellation of *sound doctrine* to that which may instruct men to godliness; for all trifles vanish away when that which is solid is taught. . . . 'Sound doctrine' is so called from the effect produced by it; as, on the contrary, he says, that unskilful men dote about questions which do no good. *Sound*, therefore, means wholesome, that which actually feeds souls. Thus, by a single word, as by a solemn proclamation, he banishes from the Church all speculations which serve rather to promote ostentation than to aid godliness as he did in both of the Epistles to Timothy.

"He makes 'sound doctrine' to consist of two parts. The first is that which magnifies the grace of God in Christ from which we may learn where we ought to seek our salvation; and the second is that by which the life is trained to the fear of God, and inoffensive conduct."

(On Titus 2:1)

"The 'doctrine' will not be consistent with 'godliness' if it do not instruct us in the fear and worship of God, if it do not edify our faith, if it do not train us to patience, humility, and all the duties of that love which we owe to our fellow-men. Whoever, therefore, does not strive to teach usefully, does not teach as he ought to do; and not only so, but that doctrine is neither godly nor sound whatever may be the brilliancy of its display, that does not tend to the profit of the hearers."

(On I Timothy 6:4)

"He judges of doctrine by the fruit; for everything that does not edify ought to be rejected, although it has no other fault; and everything that is of no avail but for raising contentions, ought to be doubly condemned. And such are all subtle questions on which ambitious men exercise their faculties. Let us, therefore, remember, that all doctrines must be tried by this rule, that those which contribute to edification may be approved, and that those which give ground for unprofitable disputes may be rejected as unworthy of the Church of God."

(On I Timothy 1:4)

"Here we have a definition of Christian wisdom — to know what is advantageous or expedient — not to torture the mind with empty subtleties and speculations. For the Lord does not wish that his believing people should employ themselves fruitlessly in learning what is of no profit: From this you may gather in what estimation the Sorbonnic theology ought to be held, in which you may spend your whole life, and yet not derive more of edification from it in connection with the hope of a heavenly life, or more of spiritual advantage, than from the demonstrations of Euclid. Unquestionably, though it taught nothing false, it well deserves to be execrable, on this ground that it is a pernicious profanation of spiritual doctrine. For *Scripture is useful*, as Paul says, in 2 Tim. iii, 16, but *there* you will find nothing but cold subtleties of words."

(On Philippians 1:10)



# Working Patterns in the Social-Economic Field

by P. Borst

## *The Christian Message All-Dominating*

We are easily inclined to see only the worst side of the undoubtedly difficult time in which we live. But we should have an eye for the brighter side too. From a social point of view, we can now see that Christians have begun to leave their underground shelters. Fifty years ago we still heard: "Religion is a private matter." Christianity had nothing to do with the social-economic struggle; people thought it strange that Christians should want to put their faith into practice in the social-economic field. That was nonsense: one had only to study facts and nothing but facts. Christians were to keep to their closet, and at best virtually limit their social action to *caritas*.

Today Christians are dealing with working patterns in the social-economic field on a Christian basis. They are bearing witness to the confession that Christian belief dominates all; the message of Jesus Christ applies to the whole of life. In the words of the Dutch statesman Dr. Abraham Kuyper: "There is not one inch of human life of which Christ does not say: It is mine." The sovereignty of God must be expressed in every area of life, individually and socially.

We are very grateful for this re-birth of Christendom, because herewith it returns to its first and perhaps best period. From its very beginning Christianity influenced social and economic life: it established foundations for the poor; it put an end to the practice of exposing unwanted children; it lessened the severity of penal laws; it put an end to the horrible gladiator fights; it also influenced the law of contracts.

Besides the victories, however, there were defeats. We feel ashamed when we see how Christian doctrine was abused: slavery was defended with the Bible, the laissez-faire doctrine was called a consequence of divine ordination; and the eight-hour day was rejected on the ground of the text: "Work while it is day."

That is to say, when Christianity tried to influence the world, it made many mistakes. But at all events it *had* influence. Fifty years ago Christianity was dangerously near losing every influence on social and economic life. It is therefore encouraging to note that in our day Christians are again trying to apply the message of Jesus Christ in the social-economic field.

The task of applying the message to practical

matters is beset with difficulties. But there is hope! I mention one encouraging detail. *Time Magazine* of May 5, 1958, dealing with the first of May as an American Day of Law, spoke about law as follows: "There is a distinct resurgence of the notion of morality in the law." And in the same issue: "We claim for stable principles to which we can anchor faith." These are remarkable words after a period of materialism, scepticism, and relativism in law. After World War II we know by bitter experience what becomes of the world when law and morality are the slaves of power and interest. I remind you of Hitler's words, "*Recht ist, was dem Staate nützt*" (law is what is useful for the state). According to this doctrine morality does not dominate the facts, but the facts dominate morality; and there is no room for the Christian message.

## *The Christian Message Negative*

Now we should not think that only extreme dictators and mad imperialists want to destroy law and morality. In the Twenties the president of an employers' organization in the Netherlands said: "Every movement in life is essentially a struggle, leading to destruction and ruin. He who wants to establish peace is a superficial observer. The true ambition of everybody is only to serve his own interests." And twenty-three hundred years ago almost the same was said by the Greek Thrasymachus. In Plato's *Republic* we read his words: "Justice is nothing else than the interest of the strong." Interest and power are the great realities and have the final word. Who claims that interest and power should be dominated by religion, by law and morality, seems an impractical idealist. I draw your attention to the definition of law in the latest philosophy of law: "Law is what is necessary to assure certain interests by means of constraint." Law is power. Law is a consequence of our instinct for self-preservation. Freud seems very convincing: the leaning towards aggression is inborn and moral values are only a sublimation of this instinct. Interest and power are central. Nothing in life is so real, so powerful, so dominating as interest — call it profit, utility, happiness, or the good life. This is the gospel according to man. Montesquieu said: "Interest is the supreme monarch in the world." Sometimes we are a bit ashamed of this egotism and we then sublimate the happiness of the individual to the happiness of the many —



the general interest. But this general interest is not to be controlled by morality and justice: it is self-sufficient, independent of morality and law. The German philosopher of law, Coing, said: "Power never will bind itself finally." There can be no subjection, to no one and to nothing, neither for the individual, nor for the group. Christianity does not hesitate firmly to reject this doctrine of ruthless power.

Now we must not deceive ourselves. The man of power and the group founded on power never reveal themselves as centers of power. They do not show their true selves but hide under the cloak of law. They play a kind of trick through the so-called "sense of justice." Hitler spoke about "*gesundes Volksempfinden*." No better trick than this trick. Radbruch once wrote: "The sense of justice is especially liable to hypocrisy and self-deception: egotism, envy and jealousy, self-righteousness, aggressiveness and love of power and vengeance disguise themselves as sense of justice."

Professor Anema, a Christian who devoted his life to the application of his religious principles to the science of law, could be more concrete: "God's Word and the facts teach me that the sense of justice has been spoilt by sin and needs completion and correction through divine revelation."

So Christianity has a clear, negative message: power and interest that dominate morality and law are not acceptable. This is a clear directive for the social-economic struggle.

### *The Christian Message Positive*

In regard to the negative message we find a certain unanimity. As soon, however, as we try to give a positive answer, we find unanimity difficult to achieve. Is there a clear, positive message of our unquestionable, Christian faith? Yes and no.

In the first place: yes. We are thankful that divine revelation is positive and clear. When I read the Bible I do not find the doctrine of ruthless power, but the doctrine of the Christian spirit, that is, the inclination to community and fellowship. This is positive. Galatians 5 has a clear negative and positive message: the works of the flesh are: . . . hatred, wrath, envyings. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance. Sir George Schuster has said: "I believe the answers are to be found in those two commandments on which, as Christ said, hang all the law and the prophets." Something of it we read also in I Corinthians 12, where the Apostle uses the metaphor of the human body: "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." That is the idea of community, of fellowship. Cain's question: "Am I my brother's keeper?" is the question of a murderer. Man is a social being. Already in the story of the creation of the world we read: "It is not good that

the man should be alone." In the relation of fellowship we find the destination of man in God's image.

So when I repeat the question: Is God's Word clear? I reply: yes. But, alas, I can also say: no. It is a fact that for the application to practical conditions the Bible does not give a system of rules of how we should behave in the social-economic struggle. I have already mentioned the mistakes which Christendom made in history. We have to be careful that we do not absolutize, that we do not make rigid, that we do not pervert the Bible by means of formulations. It is the same as with our sense of justice: we like to read in the Bible what we want. So we have to leave it, saying the Bible does not give us directives. But when in the magazine *Time* we hear the voice: "We claim for stable principles to which we can anchor faith," we cannot put this question off, answering: There is no divine charter of the ends of law; you have to find out for yourself. No, we should start to work individually as well as collectively to try to find a concretization and formulation of the message of the gospel for modern times. We have to study the Bible, we have to study God's creation. In this creation we discover structures, *Zusammenhänge*, divine ordinations. They are hidden and spoiled by sin, but through the light of the Scriptures we can discover many things. We do not find immutable rules of natural law, valid always and everywhere, no eternal principles, but we understand that God's Word has its own message for every age and it is our duty to find out this message as concretely as possible. That is why the title of this article is "Working Patterns in the Social-Economic Struggle." We should be careful not to absolutize these working patterns — they can become rigid, we can pervert them — but there must be working patterns.

### *The Line of Ruthless Power and the Line of Christian Spirit*

Many working patterns exist. I shall have to make a selection and try to see them in the light of the gospel. I have chosen working patterns concerning the industrial organizations, the co-operation of employers and workers in various branches of industry. I pass by working patterns concerning human relations in the enterprise; I also pass by working patterns concerning the task of the state in the social and economic field. I focus attention on the industrial organization because the co-operation of employers in employers associations and cartels, like the co-operation of workers in trade unions, is a form of concentration of power, and the concentration of power has been called "the biggest problem of our time."

I am convinced that for this biggest problem of our time Christianity has its own, special, and clear message. Precisely because this problem has to do



with power, we immediately see the contrast between the idea of ruthless power and the idea of Christian spirit. Ruthless power, as I have already mentioned, is in flat contradiction with the Christian commandments. No law without power and no power without law, that is the ideal. Power in itself is not sinful, but the absolutizing of power, ruthless power, is sinful. Power may not have the final word. Against this kind of power we put the idea of Christian spirit, the inclination to fellowship, the inclination to submit to law and morality. So we see the contrast: on one side the line of ruthless power, on the other side the line of Christian spirit. Naturally I am schematizing to some extent, but this scheme is useful, because it enables us to look critically at several working patterns in the social-economic struggle.

### *Employers' Associations and Trade Unions*

We all know the concentration of power which we find in the co-operation of employers in a given branch of industry by means of trade associations. In the same way we are familiar with the co-operation of workers in a given branch of industry by means of trade unions. How must we, as Christians, see these forms of co-operation?

I do not agree with Erasmus when he says in *The Praise of Folly*: "The most foolish and meanest class of people are the businessmen, for they have the meanest trade and they prosecute it in the meanest way possible." If this were true, I would be against co-operation of industrials, for then it would be a concentration of sin. Nor do I agree with the rather strong opinion of today that every co-operation of employers and every resolution they take is a product of egotistic collectivism and that only the unorganized, the outsider, the solitary strong man, should be praised.

I feel that our Christian faith provides a very workable directive to distinguish in this field between good and evil. If the concentration is performed in the line of ruthless power, only for the sake of power, only to serve private interest, without any limitation by law and morality; if power claims the final word for private interest; if through employers' associations and trade unions power is absolutized, it is absolutely wrong. This is group-egotism and the State as protector of the general interest has to fight against this kind of concentration.

We can see the co-operation of employers and the co-operation of labor in another line: in the line of the Christian spirit. This line tends to fellowship, and then organization is a consequence of fellowship. Who is more our neighbor than the man with whom we share a common task, or better, to whom God appointed the same task? If we see our occupation as a vocation, a calling, then the organization of colleagues in the same branch is a

community of vocation. Thus people in the same branch are not loose one from the other; and he who keeps himself apart, the unorganized, is fundamentally in the wrong. Our competitor is our colleague; and he who says: "I have nothing to do with my colleague," follows the sinister example of Cain. Co-operation as an exponent of ruthless power is diabolic; co-operation in the spirit of fellowship is a divine commandment.

But there is more. In Genesis 1:28 God orders us to replenish the earth and subdue it and to have dominion over it. This is a commandment to develop God's creation, that is, to do our utmost in our work. But if we have to do our utmost then we must realize that sometimes the utmost is reached better by co-operation than by individual effort. In this respect I mention collective information and collective research. Here competitors are morally obliged to reach the maximum by means of co-operation.

If we see the essence of organization in this spirit we have to accept the consequences, for then we reject syndicalism, in which the State is overgrown by the dominating organizations. In that event the organizations have the final say: the principle of ruthless power operates. A community founded upon a moral basis obeys the law and thus the State, the protector of law. Another consequence is that in the internal relations of the organizations the leaders may not have the final word. Every member must have the legal right to defend himself before an independent court against abuse of power by the leaders of the organization. The third consequence is that the members of the organization acknowledge that they have moral, social, and legal duties towards each other. For the individual, too, has no right to absolutize himself as a center of power. Therefore organization rules based on law and morality cannot be disapproved by us. A fourth consequence is that we see the member of an organization as God's creation, whose freedom has to be respected as much as possible. A totalitarian justice, ruling everything and leaving nothing to the responsibility of the individual, kills what is the core of our faith: the spirit of fellowship. All regulations of the organization should be framed in such a way that they appeal to the sense of fellowship of the individual members. The task of the industrial organizations, therefore, is not to dethrone the industrialists, but to fight against the evident abuses in the branch. Never should co-operation of employers or workers be a symptom of ruthless power.

Will such a view of organizational relations be accepted? Götz Brief once said: "As soon as the religious and ethic sense is lost, the members of the organizations have only one claim: my organization has to serve *my* interest and the leaders of



the organization have to do this and to do that, and it is the duty of the leaders to accomplish this end with all available means. Then there exists no sense of fellowship." Here I would quote the words of the present Dutch Minister of Economic Affairs: "Only religious reflection and consideration will enable our society to escape the war of interests of all against all."

### *Collective Agreements*

Up till now we have discussed the relationships among employers and the relationships among workers: both are concentrations of power. We take the next step now: co-operation between groups of workers and groups of employers: a double concentration of power.

Many people appreciate this concentration, believing that in this way a balance of power can be attained. Personally I do not like the expression "balance of power." Too much misery has been the result of the doctrine of the balance of power. The term is not true; it is too optimistic. Formation of power does not always lead to a balance of power: often the weaker is crushed by the stronger. The same optimism prevailed in regard to individual relationships 150 years ago: the free play of the forces leads to "*harmonies économiques*." The Christian, knowing the power of sin, is less optimistic. This free play, individually or socially, does not always create harmony; sometimes it leads to misery, injustice and destruction. The question is: What is to be done if the collective powers are not evenly balanced, if the employers are weak and labor is strong, or the other way around? The doctrine of ruthless power says: let the weaker party be defeated. That is the working pattern of direct action. Conquer what can be conquered. This is class struggle in its sharpest form.

Compared with direct action, the collective contract represents real progress. Employers' and workers' groups negotiate — bargaining is the usual but not beautiful word — and eventually agree to establish a legal community, for a certain period, and to exclude strikes and lock-outs, that is, exclude direct action, exclude the use of ruthless power. Joint consultation means community of task, community of calling. It is thus that we achieve peace in a company or in a whole branch of industry.

In and behind the collective agreement, however, we sometimes see a line of ruthless power: power can dominate the collective agreement. Whether or not it does depends on the mentality of those who make the contract. Is the bargaining done in an atmosphere of reasonableness, confidence, readiness to joint-consultation, mutual esteem, sense of responsibility? Then we find a spirit of fellowship. If, on the other hand, the bargaining is based on bluff,

threat, deceit and aggressiveness, then the result will at the most demonstrate who is the stronger party, but it will be without a shred of justice and morality.

So we see that collective agreement is not always a "Christian institution"; it stands under the criticism of our Christian faith: an agreement which is the result of ruthless power is wrong; an agreement based on the spirit of fellowship is generally right.

But I have another thing to say about this contract; not about the spirit in which it is made, but about the construction and essence of it. I see two weak points.

### *Lasting Trade Rules*

Collective agreements are concluded for one or two years; at least for a relatively short period. Is a given contract an armistice or a peace contract? That depends on the spirit in which it is made, as we have already seen. But the tragedy is that, even if there is a spirit of fellowship and the parties do not take positions of power, but act from their sense of justice, these senses of justice — as Radbruch wrote — sometimes vary so strongly that the parties cannot come to an agreement. What then? Shall the two parties war against each other? Shall strike and lock-out be used as the most democratic means to attain a result? Is power more than law? Did not Cicero say already 2,000 years ago: "May weapons make a way for law"? Was Euripides wrong when 2,400 years ago he saw that war is the most stupid solution for any human conflict? Is there no Christian message in this situation? Everyone must acknowledge that power in itself does not guarantee justice. On the contrary, the law of the strongest takes the place of justice. The play of collective power is as whimsical and arbitrary as the play of individual power. But what is worse is that the strongest has the final word; power is not controlled by justice or morals. I know that some people think this social war is acceptable, provided that certain rules of the game be observed. But for all these rules, the war is not less terrible. He who aims at a spirit of fellowship tries to prevent these wars, and this should certainly be possible within the borders of national if not international life.

Thus we look for lasting trade rules. And here I become very practical. The president of the Protestant Labor Union in the Netherlands has written a booklet on trade unions and I read there: "Strikes are only permitted if the employer has rejected even the last offer of impartial arbitration." That is the spirit of fellowship: to keep peace by way of the law. Here is a mentality other than that of the party which feels itself strong and adores power. Many groups reject the way of law and justice, confident that by their own power they can



obtain better results. Right or wrong, profit decides. For such strong groups the legal way is not profitable; but woe betide the weak! Now we understand why law has been called "the cry of the oppressed." According to the story in the New Testament it is a poor widow, a weak person, who cries and claims the help of the judge; the strong man hates the law. To him the doctrine of ruthless power is more alluring.

Our Christian conviction gives us a clear directive. We know which way we have to go. We have to seek peace and avoid war as much as possible, even if we should happen to be the stronger party. I am glad to see that this lasting trade-law is being obeyed by some groups. For example, the Swedish Peace Pact, a non-strike agreement of the daily press, has been operative since 1937 (the latest agreement covers the period 1954-1962) and excludes any unilateral pressure by means of strike and lock-out.

### *Emancipation of the Worker in the Economic Field*

There is another weak point in the collective contract: it is one-sided, it concerns only the labor conditions, not the economy of a branch of industry. Simone Weil expressed it as follows: "The situation of the worker was twofold inhuman: at first lack of money and then lack of dignity." Many years ago there was poverty and distress among the workers, and we are happy that most of it, at least in the Western countries, has disappeared. But there is still lack of dignity — at least that is true of the manual worker of Western Europe. The manual worker of Western Europe has an inferiority complex. He does not feel himself to be a complete citizen, he is "only a working-man"; socially and spiritually he has not yet been emancipated. Collective agreement does not give him that emancipation; it deals only with wages, conditions of labor. But the working-man is more than a wage-earning machine; he is God's creature, from whom God asks a spirit of fellowship, that is, fellowship towards other workers, towards his employer, and thus towards the problems, even the economic and technical problems of the company and the branch of industry of which the company is a member. He has to feel his responsibility, not only towards his family by not earning too little, but also towards the good course of affairs in the workshop and the enterprise; he has to know why he works, what is the aim of his work. On the level of a branch of industry this means a Joint Industrial Council dealing not only with labor, but also with economic problems. I need not indicate here how far this should go, but I must remind you that these things have to do with our faith, with our view of the worker as God's creature. There must be a new responsibility in economic affairs which

does not dethrone the employer, but which does stimulate the spirit of fellowship.

### *Education to Promote the Spirit of Fellowship in Organizations*

Trying to create a spirit of fellowship is a hard and elaborate task. The trade associations and trade unions are not allowed to withdraw from that task, even when they know that in this domain the church must also do what it can. Some people have emphasized this spirit of fellowship so much that they are against separate organizations of employers and of workers, considering this separation as a sign of class struggle. We have already seen that this class struggle is not inevitable. If these separate groups are working closely together in friendship and confidence, if they have joint industrial councils dealing with labor and economic affairs, if they can establish a lasting peace — for example, by means of voluntary arbitration — then the spirit of fellowship dominates.

Will this ideal come true? The wind is not favorable for the idea of fellowship. To change the minds, to create a sense of fellowship means that we must come into touch with man as an individual, with every man in a trade. And here we are confronted by the great problem of our time. Unfortunately we may well wonder: Does man as an individual still exist, or is there only the mass? Where is the individual who feels personal responsibility for his task, and for the economic and technical prospects of his work and his trade? I may urge you to read Bednarik's *The Young Worker of Our Time*. According to Bednarik the young worker is cynical, an egotist, without faith, without any sense of fellowship; he knows only interest, good life, wages, amusement; he laughs at principles, let alone stable principles; he does not want any responsibility. He only asks: "How can I serve myself and get better conditions?" The same reasoning is followed by many industrialists: "I am only interested in profit; I laugh at the idea of a task and a community of tasks." Interest has conquered the world. That is the idea of power in its most miserable and horrible form. These people have no sense of justice, they do not feel for arbitration; they loathe the rules of law, they idolize power. A victory of the spirit of fellowship is only possible through a change in the individual mentality of workers and employers.

Will trade associations and trade unions have enough influence to achieve this change? Unfortunately we must doubt this. We have to acknowledge that nowadays the organization leaders are often out of touch with the members. Then the trade association or the trade union is an oligarchy where the leaders are not able to influence the members, to make them complete citizens of the industry. When they speak about higher wages and



shorter working hours, there is a kind of interest. But when they deal with the economic problems of the branch, the members ask to be left alone: they sham deafness. So the struggle to arouse a new sense of responsibility in the worker is a hard struggle, almost a desperate struggle. And it is a general struggle, for we meet with the same difficulties in dealing with the employers. The "massified" employer and the "massified" worker live far from Christian ethics; they are a-moral.

But the struggle is not in vain. In the beginning of this article I mentioned the rebirth of Christian action in the social-economic field, and this inspires us with courage. I now bring to your attention two working patterns in my own country, the Netherlands. Here Protestant Christian organizations

of industrials, farmers, middle-class and labor are working together in one convention which has existed already for twenty years. The Catholic Christian organizations are doing the same. And by way of national integration there exists a Foundation of Labor. The neutral, Catholic, and Protestant Christian organizations of labor — industrials, middle class and agriculture — are working together and have established close co-operation through weekly consultation, giving in this way an example of how the spirit of fellowship can conquer the doctrine of ruthless power.

We have a high task, and what is more, He who appointed this task to us has the final word, for He said: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

## Book Review

### EMERGENCY 1958

*Emergency 1958: The Story of the Ceylon Race Riots*, by Tarzie Vittachi.

London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1958. 123 pages. Price: 10s 6d.

Reviewed by RICHARD DE RIDDER, missionary to Ceylon.

Mutual respect and good-will existed between the Tamils and the Sinhalese in Ceylon for hundreds of years. All this was destroyed within the relatively brief period of thirty months, culminating in the long, tense, hate-filled days and nights of May and June, 1958. This book traces the events and gives an account of the rapid disintegration of the old-established order of social and economic relationships which existed in Ceylon. The book had to be printed in England because of a press-censorship described as "more stringent than any which was imposed during the war except in Nazi-occupied Europe." This prevented the people of Ceylon, as well as the outside world, from understanding what happened and why, and what have been the consequences of the disaster. The author, as editor of the *Ceylon Observer* (a leading daily newspaper), was in an advantageous position to gather facts, though he was not permitted to publish the book in Ceylon because of the Emergency Law.

The main thesis of the book is expressed as follows: "When a government, however popular, begins to pander to racial or religious emotionalism merely because it is the loudest of the raucous demands made on it, and then meddles in the administration and en-

forcement of law and order for the benefit of its favourites or to win the plaudits of the crowd, however hysterical it may be, catastrophe is certain."

This is exactly what happened in the months before the riots. To understand something of the background it must be remembered that Ceylon gained its independence peacefully on the 4th of February 1948, and for many years it was regarded by the West as a model among newly independent states. Tamil and Sinhalese patriots had worked side by side to gain independence and to preserve it. Out of a population of nine million people, about 22% are Tamil (Ceylon and Indian), and about 70% are Sinhalese. Each section has its own language and customs; they are divided also from each other religiously. The Sinhalese are Buddhists, the Tamils are Hindus. When a new government came to power ("The People's Government") in 1956, it gained immediate popularity with the majority by its pledge to implement various recommendations of a Buddhist Commission. Among the demands of this Commission was that Sinhalese should be made the official language of the country. This greatly affected the Tamils who adopted various tactics to show their displeasure, and who continued to plead for equal status for

Tamil in those areas where the Tamils were in the majority (North and East Ceylon). Previous to this, English had been the official language, though spoken by only 5% of the people.

The government stood firm, although the Prime Minister, in a private agreement with the leader of the Tamils, had agreed to "the reasonable use of Tamil." This time it was the turn of the Sinhalese to object. Hundreds of Buddhist priests marched to the home of the Prime Minister and camped in the streets until he had given assurance that he would abrogate his pact with the Tamils. Soon mobs of priests and thugs were openly going through the streets of Colombo with ladders, tar, and paint brushes. After one day there was hardly a Tamil word left on any store, government building, or street sign that had not been blotted out with tar. The Tamils reciprocated in their areas. The police were under orders not to interfere, though damage to private and public property was immense.

This was followed by waves of communist-instigated strikes in the Po-

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f Colombo, the Public Services, etc. according to police records, thugs were imported in organized squads to beat up strikers in the streets, and finally the government, which had declared the strikes illegal, vacillated and supported the strikers.

In other areas, Tamil and Sinhalese began to meet in pitched battles. A great deal depended on who was in the majority. In Colombo organized mobs were in control of the city and suburbs for a full twenty-four hours while the police were under instructions not to use force or arms. Looting, burning, beatings, and murder were perpetrated with brazen defiance of the law, while the government refused to take the matter seriously or to enforce its own laws.

Finally, a State of Emergency was declared, and the military forces were added to those of the police (who were given arms for the first time). A strict curfew was imposed from 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM. It took many days before the riots in places out of Colombo were quelled and forced peace descended on the country.

One cannot assess the damage. Only the authorities know how many hundreds were killed. No one can tell how many tens of thousands of Tamils fled to the North seeking safety, leaving everything behind. The friendly relationships between the races were destroyed.

There were no civil rights during the emergency. The police had authority to bury without death certificates or enquiry. There was no right of appeal from decisions of the emergency courts. All the jealously guarded and hard-won advantages of democracy were swept away overnight. Many have not been restored, and the emergency continues to be renewed by Parliamentary decree on a month-to-month basis.

"Respect for law among the people makes for order, without which no government is possible, so that it is the business of the rulers, from the point of view of self-preservation as well as public duty, to enforce the law whenever it is blatantly flouted. In order to maintain order the Government is empowered to use a police force, a civil administration, and, at times of extraordinary disturbance, a mili-

tary arm. Any government that destroys the authority of these services and whips up the suspicion and hatred of people against them is surely undermining its own strength," writes the author.

The terror and hate that the people of Ceylon experienced in May and June 1958 were the outcome of that fundamental error. What is Ceylon left with? A nation in ruins, and some grim lessons which Ceylon cannot afford to forget. While Ceylon cannot afford to ignore these lessons, we must remember that the same hate and terror cannot be permitted to breed anywhere else in the world either. Colombo and Little Rock are separated by many thousands of miles. They are not so far apart when one considers the basic problem and spirit which leads to such crises.

NOTE: The book, *Emergency* 1958, is on hand at the office of the Christian Reformed Board of Foreign Missions.

## THE FAITH OF THE CHURCH

*The Faith of the Church: A commentary on The Apostles' Creed according to Calvin's Catechism, by Karl Barth (translated by Gabriel Vahanian). New York: Meridian Books, Inc.: Living Age Books, 1958, pp. 188, Price \$1.25.*

Reviewed by James Daane, Minister of the First Christian Reformed Church, Los Angeles, Calif.

It is a wonderful thing that theological works are becoming available in inexpensive paper-bound editions. It is enough to make a poor preacher glad.

But the joy is not in the price alone. Barth and Calvin being what they are, it is a joy at any price for a Reformed student or preacher to hear Barth give his commentary on Calvin's Catechism. The commentary is short, but fresh and scintillating, and for many readers will prove very informative both in regard to Barth's thought and to Calvin's. Gabriel Vahanian says "the present work is in our estimation perhaps the best simplified and systematic introduction to the theology of Karl Barth in its correlation with the Reformation." This reviewer would add that the book is easy to read, and although

there are dimensions of meaning not easily measured, what Barth says is plain enough. Since this commentary is limited to Calvin's catechetical writing on the Apostles' Creed, its interest is the greater since it deals with the heart of the Christian faith and thus presents the heart of Barth's theology.

The reader will hear Barth, the man himself, speaking quite informally to a group of pastors and preachers. He will see Barth explaining the heart of the Christian faith, now showing agreement and great respect for Calvin, and now the humble courage honestly to disagree. Barth shows neither a blind devotion to Calvin, nor the kind of critical spirit which a lesser theologian often pays to a greater. Many would say that in Barth, Calvin meets, if not his equal in orthodoxy, yet his equal

## The Christ of the Earliest Christians

William M. Ramsay. Did the first Christians regard Jesus as primarily human, or did they insist on His divine nature? Studying the sermons of Peter, Stephen, and Paul as recorded in Acts, Dr. Ramsay finds the germs of the highly complex Christology that later developed in the other New Testament books. Foreword by James S. Stewart. (May 4) \$3.00

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in theological stature. Few great theologians have treated Calvin with greater respect.

In the short compass of this book the reader will hear Barth's defense of the virgin birth and its necessity, his insistence on the historically empty tomb and the bodily resurrection of Christ; he will read illuminating statements as to what Barth means by the super-historical, why Barth believes the phrase "the resurrection of the body" should read, as it does in French, "the resurrection of the flesh" (Barth, too, denies the immortality of the soul). And to mention no more, he will be confronted with the assertion that the term "holy" as applied to the Church has no direct moral meaning.

For the rest, a few quotations may suggest the flavor of the book:

"You realize how fitting it is to be cautious when one asserts the stiffness and severity of Calvin. Precisely it is Calvin who begins with the Creed, and not with God's demands upon us, as revealed in the law" (pp. 38, 39).

"Even as God is Father with regard to Jesus Christ, so are we men also in relation to Jesus Christ" (p. 45).

"Thus, in the Christian sense, we may speak of God 'in himself' only after we have understood his divine condescension whereby he became man in Jesus Christ" (p. 54).

"Man, for Calvin and the New Testament alike, exists by virtue of his baptism and not by virtue of his birth" (p. 70).

"Incarnation by no means signifies a diminution of his Godhead. God does not cease to be God when he becomes merciful, when he shows forth his mercy. Such an immutable God, who 'is what he is,' is a Platonic idea, a nightmare of our former dogmatics. Yes, he is what he is, but he is the living and merciful one! Hence the humiliation of God must not be put in contradiction to his majesty" (pp. 72, 73).

"Don't you think that the weakness of the Church comes from reading the Bible much too little? We do not let ourselves be led by the Scripture witnessing to Christ. We live on a certain number of ideas, a course in dogmatics and morals. If you're a minister, you preach these things for two or three years. Then you're worn out, and sad, and have nothing more to say because nothing more has been listened to. The same might be said of

prayer, for prayer is not an act apart from the Scripture. It is a request really to receive what the Scripture promises" (pp. 76, 77).

"The only true history is the history of Christ, in which the Church participates, and which is already the secret reality of all history, since it is history itself" (p. 99).

In these quotations the reader will not only discern the typically Barthian Christology, but also the book's forthright style on big theological issues.

The reader may also rediscover some motifs of Calvin's theology which he may perchance have lost somewhere along the long way. Some may be surprised, or even disturbed, to hear Calvin, in his own day of multiple churches and numerous sectarian groups, teach in his catechism, "so all ought to unite in one body, so that there may be one Church spread throughout the whole earth, and not a number of Churches." And some who seek to carry forward the tradition of Calvin may be surprised to see Calvin raise the question why hell is not mentioned in the Apostles' Creed, and to hear him answer, "Since nothing is held by

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faith except what contributes to the souls of the pious." One wonders what Calvin would say about the inclusion of the doctrine of reprobation in an official confession of the Church.

This little book presents one of the most complete bibliographies of Barth's writing ever published. The book also contains an introduction to Barth thought by the translator (Department of Religion, Princeton University) in which it is asserted, particularly with reference to Barth's defense of the virgin birth that "Barth seems to lean too conspicuously towards orthodoxy which some may regard as an all-too-obvious attempt to make Barth liberal.

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# LETTERS TO THE JOURNAL

RS:

We were recently favored by an article on the subject of Particular Synods by the Rev. Elco H. Oostendorp (*Reformed Journal*, Dec. 1958), the more valued because the writer is chairman of the Synod's study committee for this matter and he has intensively studied it.

His thesis is that continued failure to institute regional (particular) synods will now on our part constitute a violation of the genius of Reformed church polity, although he feels that this failure has not been such a violation in the past.

He takes us back to our honored former Professor W. Heyns and his large emphasis on "the profit of the churches"; indicating that the professor could favor particular synods "when their practical value and workability can be demonstrated." Well said! Let us show their "value and workability" before we assume, as the writer does, that Prof. Heyns would be in favor of particular synods now.

Our writer adds, "The size of the denomination surely warrants a new set of assemblies between classes and synod." But shall size only decide the matter as is here suggested? Shall we not do better to hold to the question of what is best for the work of our growing church?

He reasons as if it is desirable to cut down the size of our general synod, using particular synods to help us do it. Let us take a long, careful look at that! Should we put the top decisions and regulations regarding denominational matters in the hands of fewer men? For instance, the study committee suggests that the 38,596 members of five Michigan classes, joined to form one particular synod, would be represented at general synod by six members instead of the twenty now representing them. Then many are advocating that our general synod shall meet bi-ennially, so making its decisions the more far-reaching. Couldn't that be much more "board-like"? The synod would be reduced by over half and meet half as often! Could not a few strong, determined personalities more readily sway a synod of 48 men than one of 120?

Rev. Oostendorp says further: "The most important fact of all, in the case for regional synods, is the growing complexity of our denominational machinery." But, note well, these regional synods would add vastly to the amount and complexity of our church organization. There would be new assemblies, many additional offices, vastly increasing expenditure of kingdom man-power and finances. For instance, the study committee recommends that in doing our church's home mission work there shall be on the particular synod level "offices, directors, etc." Many feel that there is a danger that we become "office-heavy" in doing God's work. Apparently the plan for particular synods will conduce to much more of it.

Map study is revealing here. Take the area suggested for the particular synod of Western Canada. Spot Vancouver, then go 1700 miles east to Fort Williams, then hundreds of miles northwestward again. Then start at Lynden, go to San Diego, then to Kansas, covering the United States from north to south and more than halfway to the east coast, and you have the vast area of proposed particular synod West. Consider the man-hours and finances needed to travel, and the additional correspondence.

Here is something to note: at present our delegates to synod and its boards provide a direct and first-hand link between our highest denominational bodies and our consistories represented at classes. There these delegates give their reports coming right from "the top" and they provide first-hand answers to pertinent follow-up questions. Particular synods will change that, and disadvantageously! They will separate the top-controls of our church's work one more remove from the grass-roots, putting an extra, and long, link in the chain. Surely that will mean more complexity rather than less!

Our esteemed brother Oostendorp notes the weaknesses which attend the administration of the Fund for Needy Churches and reasons that particular synods would improve matters. However, he also says so pointedly and well: "Where has the failure been?

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At the classical level." That being the case, why not labor to correct such patent faults where they are, rather than expect correction by large organizational addition? If the classes, standing so close to their own needy churches, do not give proper consideration to these needs, shall we expect particular synods, standing another remove from such churches, to do better? More machinery never takes the place of better work!

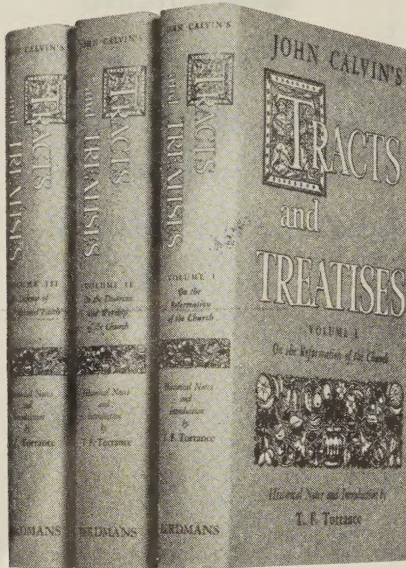
It is as our honored brother so well said in his special *Banner* article not long ago: "Our present set-up in home missions and foreign missions allows for a large amount of local initiative; the trouble is not so much in the system as in lack of interest and zeal."

In deciding on this whole matter let us never be so unrealistic as to ignore the experience of those, on our own continent, using a church polity closely akin to ours, who have said that at present the Reformed Church in America does not know what to do with its Particular Synods and that in the Presbyterian Church they have proved practically useless (said at our 1957 synod: *Banner*, Aug. 16, 1957, p. 6).

We submit that thus far we are a long way from having sufficient proof that particular synods would be a good thing for our church.

C. HOLTROP





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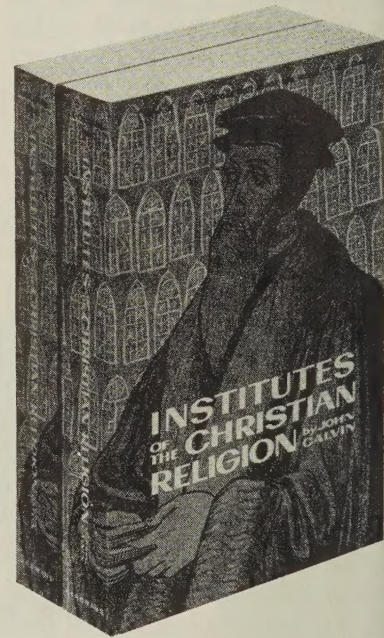
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